

NORTHWEST NEWS & UPDATES

NORTHWEST FLORIDA WATER MANAGEMENT DISTRICT

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Rare Ecosystems Preserved with Apalachicola Purchase

Some of the world's rarest aquatic and terrestrial habitats will be preserved following a purchase by the Northwest Florida Water Management District. The District recently closed on a 1,316.7-acre parcel along the Apalachicola River floodplain north of Bristol, including three miles of riverfront, for \$3,565,425.

"This is a gem we have wanted to protect for decades," said District Executive Director Douglas E. Barr.

"It is commercial forest land that has escaped extensive timber harvesting, riverside development and excessive dredge spoil impacts along one of the most ecologically diverse and significant natural riverine corridors in North America. It is a treasure of rare and endemic species that will be managed in its natural state for our children's children."

The Apalachicola River is Florida's first in flow and features its largest forested floodplain, with an adjacent botanical Eden that mixes northern and southern plants. The upper Apalachicola watershed boasts the highest density of amphibian and reptilian species north of Mexico and its ravines are home to two conifers found nowhere else, the Florida Torreya and Florida yew. The blighted Torreya no longer matures in the wild, and is one of 135 plant and animal species in the basin tracked by Florida Natural Areas Inventory.

"Some of the plant species migrated south during the last glaciation; their nearest cousins are in northern Georgia," said William O. "Bill" Cleckley, Director of the District's Division of Land Management and Acquisi-

Leigh Brooks map



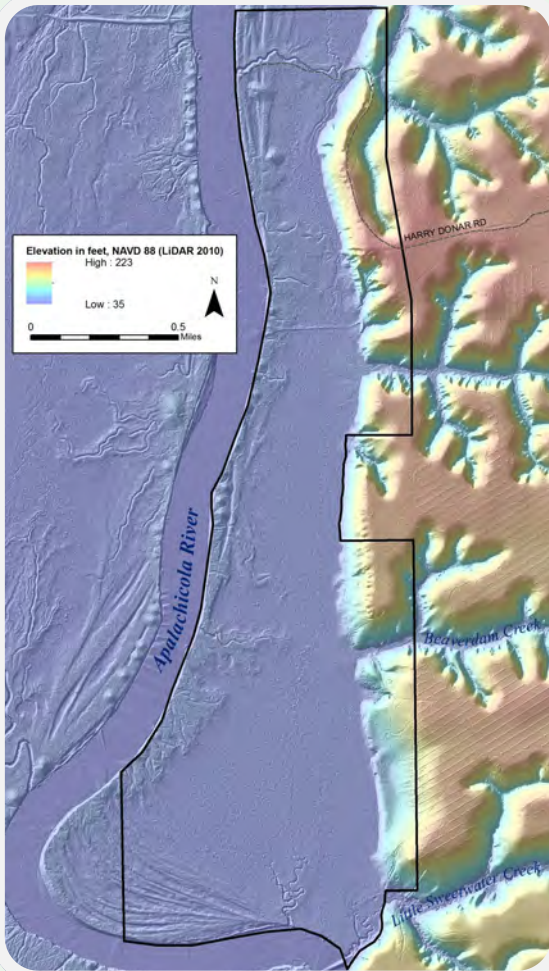
Tyler Macmillan photo

A steephead stream on District land.

tion. "These species thrive in several unique slope forest-steephead stream systems that extend to the adjoining Apalachicola Bluffs and Ravines Preserve owned by The Nature Conservancy."

Steepheads are hydrogeologic formations characterized by perpetual seepage springs that have a constant groundwater temperature, creating a climatic refuge. They create steep slopes in ancient seashores as sand slumps into them and is carried away. These steepheads contain four ecosystems—streams, wetlands, hardwood slope forests and dry upper-slope forests.

The Apalachicola River and Bay is the District's priority for Surface Water Improvement and Management. This includes tri-state negotiations to sustain natural flows and equitable water sharing. The District has also helped fund efforts to reduce pollution, restore natural systems, correct and prevent surface water problems and restore hydrology in Tate's Hell State Forest, which drains to Apalachicola Bay. District land is open to public recreation that protects water resources.



Elevations of 223 feet define bluffs on the riverfront parcel.

A Million Groundcover Plants Purchased to Restore Habitat

Wiregrass once covered the southeast and its flammable leaves helped spread fire needed to sustain 90 million acres of longleaf pine-wiregrass habitat. This natural ecosystem also included wetlands, especially wet prairie and wet pine flatwoods habitat, which are being restored across the Panhandle. The District Governing Board recently approved purchase of a half million mixed wet prairie wiregrass and toothache grass tubelings to restore over 400 acres of wet prairie and wet pine flatwoods habitat in Bay, Washington and Santa Rosa counties for mitigation purposes.

"These plants will help restore wetland functions and improve water and natural resources

for humans and natural systems," said Executive Director Douglas E.

Barr. "Also, since the District has collected these seeds from the Garcon Point Water Management Area, the germinated seedlings, especially toothache grass, come at significant savings.

"Wet prairie wiregrass and toothache grass are critical to our groundcover habitat restoration efforts," said William O. "Bill" Cleckley, Director, Division of Land Management and Acquisition. "Using these grass spe-

cies to restore wetland habitats allows us to quickly release credits to offset wetland losses due to Florida Department of Transportation road construction."

The District also plans to increase species diversity in these mitigation areas by planting 100,000 sunflower, 50,000 sneezeweed and 12,000 other native flatwood species. These include purple silky scale, white topped sedge, chaffhead, rayless sunflower and Curtis sandgrass, a state listed threatened species.



David Clayton photos

Grass was germinated from seed produced on Garcon Point following prescribed fires set during the growing season.



Sunflowers will add diversity.

Public Meetings Discussed Recreation on Altha Tract

Recreation and management of conservation land along the Chipola River near Altha was the focus of two public meetings hosted by the District in Blountstown in March. Following a 1,375-acre purchase west of Altha in December 2009, the District invited suggestions for activities consistent with the District mission of protecting water resources.

The property in Calhoun County includes two popular Chipola River access points, Johnny Boy Landing and Look and Tremble Rapids, as well as considerable riverfront and uplands. The District's management strategy for this property is to protect and, where necessary, restore

natural areas, while providing public access and compatible family-oriented recreation.

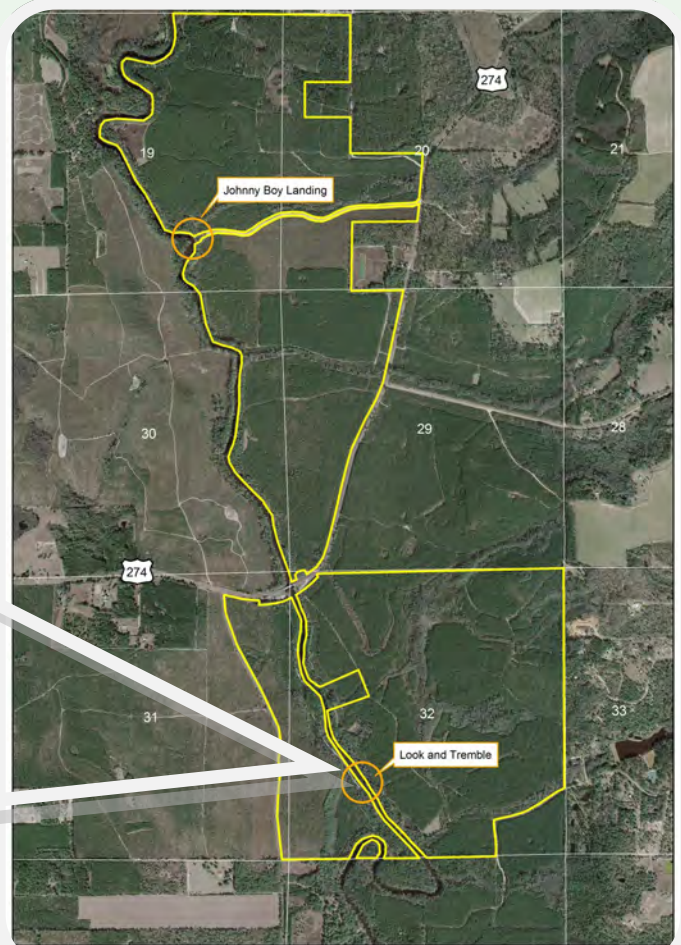
"At the first meeting on March 3," said John Valenta, District Associate Lands Manager, "participants discussed hunting, fishing, swimming, boating, canoeing/kayaking, hiking, bird watching, horseback riding and primitive camping. They were also interested in solving litter and erosion problems on the river. The second meeting on March 31 focused on developing a written public use and land management plan, including recreational activities, timbering and prescribed burning."

Hunting on the Altha tract will

be managed in cooperation with the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWC) as part of the Chipola River Wildlife Management Area, which includes another District-owned tract in Jackson County north of Marianna. Separate hunting rules have been adopted for the Altha tract, with initial activities being limited to quota-only hunts. An exception will be a two month, week-end-only small game season open to any wildlife management area permit holder. FWC representatives attended the meetings to provide an overview of the hunting regulations.



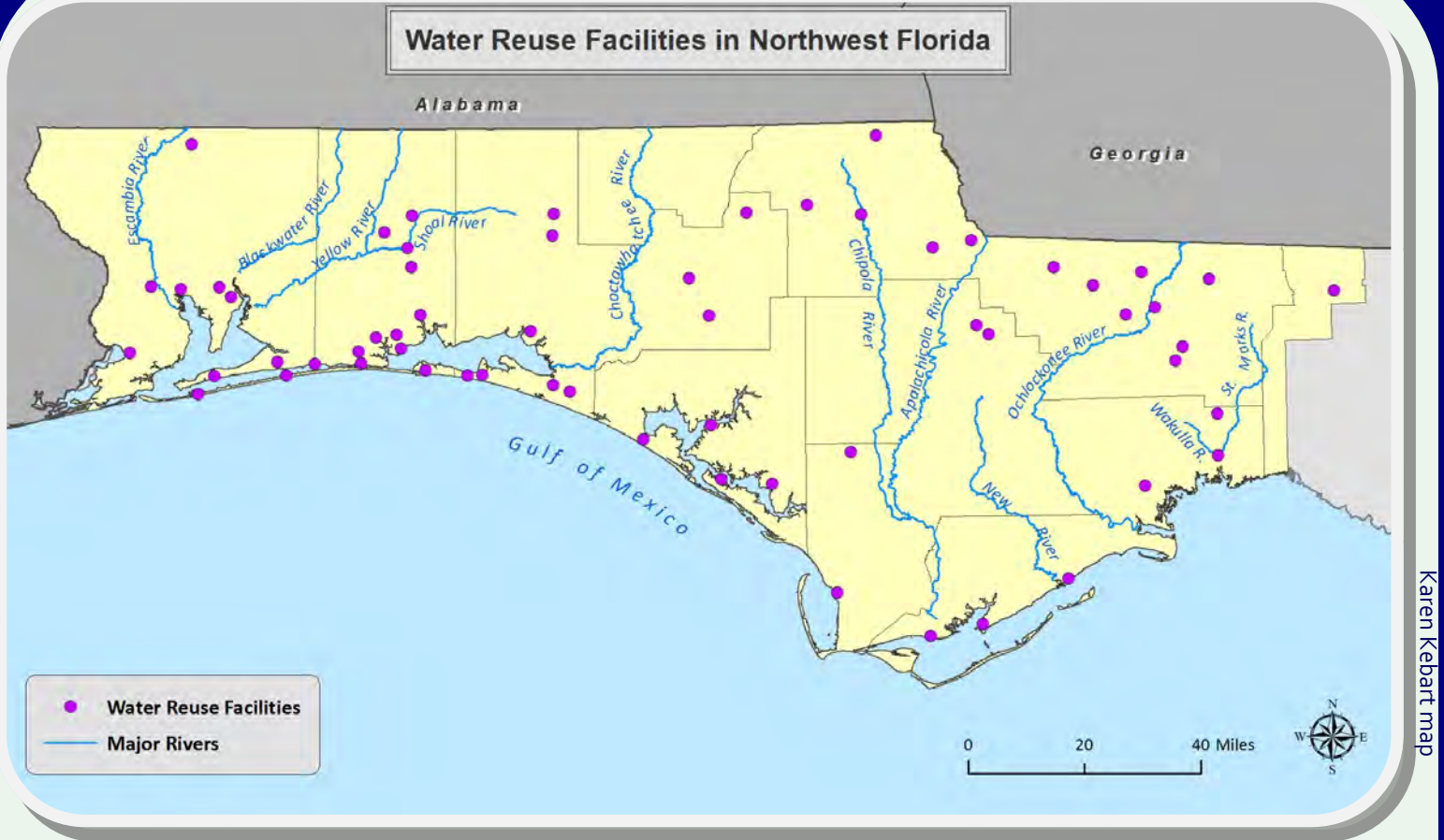
Bill Cleaveley photo



Danny Layfield map

Chipola River Water Management Area - Altha Tract

Slaves barging goods up Chipola River named these rapids Look and Tremble. Now a popular tubing spot, intrepid swimmers call it Glimpse and Giggle.



Karen Kebart map

Florida, National Water Reuse Leader

Water reuse is key to conserving fresh drinking water supplies and Florida is the national leader, reusing over 240 billion gallons of reclaimed water a year. The beneficial use of treated wastewater includes substituting highly treated wastewater for drinking water to irrigate crops and golf courses, cool power plants, flush toilets or decorate the landscape.

Reuse of treated wastewater helps Florida conserve fresh water supplies and natural resources. In 2010, the state saved more than 121 billion gallons of fresh drinking water by using reclaimed water and replenished the aquifer with more than 80 billion gallons of reclaimed water.

"Reclaimed water represents an important alternative water supply source," said District Executive Director Douglas E. Barr. "The District has helped fund facilities that will reuse millions of gallons of wastewater every day across several areas of the Panhandle. We have made important investments to recycle precious water supplies in the cities of Tallahassee, Chipley and Freeport, as well as in Wakulla, Okaloosa and Walton counties."

To draw attention to the importance of water reuse, the state's five water management districts and the Florida Department of Environmental Protection observe the third

week in May as Water Reuse Week. In 2006, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency honored Florida's Water Reuse Program with a Water Efficiency Leader Award. The program also received assistance from the Florida Department of Health, Florida Public Service Commission and other state agencies.

"The state Water Protection and Sustainability Program (WPSP) was established in 2005 to help utilities fund alternative water supply projects," said Paul Thorpe, Director of the District's Resource Planning Section. "That program helped fund several water reuse projects across northwest Florida."

Reuse It or Lose It

The District helped the City of Chipley construct its reclaimed water distribution system with a \$500,000 grant through the state's Water Protection and Sustainability Program (WPSP). This system allows the city to distribute reclaimed water to a golf course, industrial park and agricultural lands reducing the use of fresh water. These facilities and the city's wastewater treatment upgrades also eliminate the discharge of treated wastewater to Holmes Creek.



Paul Thorpe photos



The Bob Sikes Water Reclamation Facility near Crestview tripled to 1 million gallons a day the wastewater reclaimed for reuse in Okaloosa County. The District contributed \$2 million of the \$7 million expansion through the WPSP to help construct new administration and chlorination buildings, treatment modifications and advanced Membrane Bioreactor Technology.

Reuse It or Lose It

The Wakulla County reuse project, when completed, will help conserve ground water by investing in advanced wastewater treatment and using about 350,000 gallons a day of reclaimed wastewater to irrigate Wildwood Country Club golf course. The District provided \$500,000 in construction funds to Wakulla County, through the WPSP, for the reuse line.



Photo courtesy of Wildwood Country Club



Aero Photo courtesy of City of Tallahassee

The District provided \$1.35 million through the WPSP for the Tram Road Public Access Reuse Facility, part of the City of Tallahassee's \$200 million effort to reduce wastewater from Southeast Farm Sprayfield to help improve water quality in Wakulla Springs .

Purchase Opens Access to Upper Econfina Creek Basin

The public will gain enhanced access to upper Econfina Creek basin in southwest Jackson County following action taken recently. The Northwest Florida Water Management District Governing Board approved a \$104,900 purchase of over 61 acres next to District land located west of County Road 167 across from Seventeen Mile Lake.

“This purchase will allow the public to enjoy the natural resources of the creek’s upper basin,” said Douglas E. Barr, District Executive Director.

“The District owns 640 acres in the area and has been trying to obtain public access to the property for years,” said William O. “Bill” Cleckley, Director of the Division of Land Management and Acquisition. “Visitors will be invited to enjoy recreation consistent with the District mission of protecting water resources, such as hunting, hiking, birding and nature appreciation.”

The property is primarily sandhill upland habitat that has been planted in slash pine. A seepage stream flows to upper Econfina Creek along the southern boundary. The creek is a major source of drinking water for Bay County and a District priority for Surface Water Improvement and Management to preserve the water resources of Bay, Washington and Jackson counties.



The Econfina Creek parcel provides access to upper Econfina Creek from County Road 167 through a slash pine plantation. It is bordered on the south by a seepage stream flowing to upper Econfina Creek.



Tyler Macmillan photo

District staff noted precipitous steephead drop-offs on the District's recent Apalachicola River purchase.

We're on the web!
nwfwmd.state.fl.us

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District Helps Improve Calhoun County Water Supply

The water system at Pine Island, an unincorporated community north of Blountstown, is expecting substantial improvements following action by the Northwest Florida Water Management District Governing Board. The District approved a \$98,607 grant agreement to help Calhoun County develop a facilities plan that would extend a new transmission main from the City of Blountstown to the Pine Island Water System.

“The Governing Board has made it a priority to assist local governments and utilities with water supply development,” said Douglas E. Barr, District Executive Director. “Because Calhoun County

is in a designated Rural Area of Critical Economic Concern, it is also a state priority for financial assistance.”

Pine Island has been served by a small, privately owned system and residents have petitioned Calhoun County to make substantial repairs to the antiquated water system. The county has agreed to apply for construction funding from the Drinking Water State Revolving Fund and possibly other sources.

The project will involve planning, engineering and environmental services needed to help construct improvements to the Pine Island water supply system.